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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: ELECTION LAW WORKING GROUP STALLS, BUT
TALKS CONTINUE

REF: TBILISI 2005

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The United National Movement (UNM) announced that it would pull out of the Election Law Working Group (ELWG) on November 18 after consensus could not be reached, but informal talks among the parties continue. A wide-ranging package had been agreed to by all parties except for those in Alasania's Alliance (reftel). The area of disagreement was the question of mayoral threshold. The Alliance proposed adding a 45 percent threshold, down from its earlier 50 percent demand, to the overall UNM package while the UNM stuck to its 30 percent proposal. Both measures were taken to a vote and neither received consensus.

After the session, UNM representative MP Pavel Kubliashvili (Chairman of the Judiciary Committee) announced that no further consensus could be achieved making further ELWG meetings pointless. Nevertheless, behind-the-scenes talks are continuing, and Embassy Tbilisi will urge all sides to continue the dialogue. It has become clear that there is not agreement among all members of the Alasania-led Alliance for Georgia on issues related to the local elections, as the political calculus for the parties are divergent, further complicating the quest for consensus. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: The threshold issue is of crucial importance primarily to Alasania who, in the absence of united opposition support behind one candidate, sees it as the key to gaining broad opposition support for his candidacy for Tbilisi mayor. The threshold is of minimal, if any, importance to other stakeholders who will likely sign on to any compromise proposal between the Alliance and UNM. UNM representatives have indicated both publicly and privately that they remain open to discussions outside the ELWG forum. Following on discussions in the Democracy Working Group (septel), we will approach the GoG and convey the importance of being as accommodating and flexible as possible to encourage participation in the electoral process but will not promote any specific area of compromise. End Comment.

Threshold is the Key

¶3. (C) The ELWG reached unanimous consensus on the makeup of the CEC, makeup of the Tbilisi city council, voter lists and a number of other issues (reftel). The threshold for the Tbilisi mayor race remained the only major sticking point when the ELWG convened November 18. Alasania wanted a high threshold, as he understands that this is the only way he can push the election to a second round, thereby escaping having his votes diluted by a number of opposition candidates. To date, Koba Davitashvili (People's Party) and Zviad Dzidziguri (Conservatives) have also announced their candidacy. Labor and Christian Democrats are also expected to announce candidates. Alasania's political calculation is to finish second to likely UNM candidate and current mayor Gigi Ugulava, and then win a runoff in opposition leaning Tbilisi.

The higher the threshold, the better chance Alasania has of forcing a second round runoff. More radical non-parliamentary opposition leaders have a vested interest in seeing Alasania's more moderate tack fail, and therefore, do not support Alasania's position. The UNM likewise, sees no political benefit in a higher threshold as they are confident their candidate will win an easy plurality of the vote and want to avoid a second round in the opposition leaning capital. (Embassy Comment: Currently, UNM's internal poll numbers for Ugulava are approaching fifty percent. End Comment).

Current State of Play

14. (C) Alasania ally Alex Petriashvili (Our Georgia - Free Democrats) told Poloff that his party has told the GoG and UNM that a 40 percent threshold is their red-line. Before the UNM pulled out of the ELWG, UNM representative MP Akaki Minashvili (Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee) told Poloff that UNM had an intense internal debate over the electoral package. Minashvili doubted that much room for further flexibility or compromise remained. CDM leader Giorgi Targamadze told Poloff that he viewed the current impasse as political posturing between Alasania and the UNM and would sign off on any agreement on which the two sides agree. CDM ELWG representative Vice Speaker of Parliament Levan Vepkhadze told Poloff that Zurab Abashidze (Our Georgia - Free Democrats) told him that the Alliance had no backup plan if UNM did not agree to the forty percent threshold, but that they would participate in local elections in some form. Alex Petriashvili confirmed to Poloff that Our Georgia - Free Democrats would have to evaluate how and if

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they participate in elections if no agreement is reached.

An Unsteady Alliance

15. (C) Both Targamadze and Vepkhadze told Poloff that Alasania announced his candidacy for Tbilisi before the modalities of the election were clear, and now he is looking for a way out, as he has realized the significant political challenge. Targamadze and Vepkhadze also questioned how committed Alasania's partners, party leaders David Gamkrelidze (New Rights) and David Usupashvili (Republicans), were to his candidacy. Interactions between the representatives of Our Georgia - Free Democrats, the Republicans, and New Rights at the ELWG gave the clear impression that the allies had not coordinated their positions ahead of time and that they did not have a consensus position. Other Embassy contacts have raised concerns that New Rights and Republicans ultimately want to find a pretext to pull out of local elections. Gamkrelidze and Usupashvili both view themselves as national players and would be unlikely to accept any municipal position in an Alasania mayoral administration. If Alasania should lose the mayoral election, Gamkrelidze and Usupashvili's stature would be further diminished giving both incentive to avoid involving themselves in an Alasania mayoral race altogether. BASS